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## **A printmaker's interpretations in mystery and fantasy**

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
A PRINTMAKER'S  
INTERPRETATIONS IN MYSTERY AND FANTASY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF THE COLLEGE OF FINE AND APPLIED ARTS  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF FINE ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF PRINTMAKING

BY

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ROCHESTER, NEW YORK  
MARCH 1978

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*approved*  
*5/26/78*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS . . . . .	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	iv
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Chapter	
I. The Stories . . . . .	2
II. Reality and Fantasy . . . . .	8
III. Technique . . . . .	13
. . . . .	
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	23

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figure

1.	"On the Carrousel of Summer Dreams" . . . . .	15
2.	"Children Grew in Grandpa's Garden" . . . . .	16
3.	"From the Outside Looking In" . . . . .	17
4.	"Michael Smiling to the Wind" . . . . .	18
5.	"The Charles P. Shaffer and Goggin Family" . . .	19
6.	"Full Time Illusions" . . . . .	20
7.	"A Case of Partial Extremes" . . . . .	21
8.	"The Deerslayers" . . . . .	22



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I lovingly dedicate my work to my mother, Ethel P. Shaffer, whose support and encouragement transcend the limits of this sphere of existence and life. I would like to express my special gratitude to my friend and advisor, Norman Bate, for permitting me to discover printmaking and inspiring me towards exploration and subsequently, self-expression. I also thank Bruce Sodervick and Lawrence Williams for their spiritual and technical guidance, respectively.

## INTRODUCTION

I approach an empty plate after analyzing what has been on my mind for a long while. The resulting image is often derived through attempting to redefine a personal relationship which is important to me. Drawing a problem releases pressures through increased exposure to the situation; etching is an evolutionary process which takes a long time. My prints allow me to honestly define and describe my feelings--each print story making for a newer, healthier reality.

Reality is a very abstract and vague concept to me--a true mystery because it must be interpreted and can be viewed in many different ways. Fantasy is supposedly in conflict with reality; but since reality is not absolute, neither is fantasy totally fantastic. The separation of reality from fantasy involves perception. My etchings are perceptions or stories about my "own little world"; therefore my thesis is titled "A Printmaker's Interpretations In Mystery and Fantasy".

## CHAPTER I

### The Stories

My images are reflections of myself. I would like to reveal the implications of each plate story, i.e., what I was interested in when I planned the plate. The judgments and conclusions concerning the stories cannot be made by me as I am too much a part of each story. My concerns and feelings can only touch the edges of each experience.

"On the Carrousel of Summer Dreams" is a self-portrait dealing with reality and fantasy. I started this plate to symbolize the relationship that I have with my deceased mother, a woman I dearly loved and trusted. The print captures the dark, lonely moments I sometimes feel.

The carrousel symbolizes life's ups and downs and the constant starting and stopping of life. The carrousel also seems to symbolize death with its glaring, tortured horses, going around and around, impaled by a brass rod, never to escape. The horses are heavy, wooden forms in gaudy, bright, and chipping colors--listening to the whining gears as loud, tinny music plays. They seem gay but are somehow sad and haunting. Because I was constantly at Seabreeze Park observing these paradoxical creatures, I was given a job as "park artist", soon to repair and restore

the horses. The etched plate's setting, which started as fantasy, became reality.

The etching contains five horses, the large white horse, my favorite on the carrousel at Seabreeze, is a sad, tormented creature who points the way to a contemplative me. I seem to melt into a rather awkward and glazed horse which has the dark moth of life on its nose. The black horse at the bottom right-hand corner of the print is a fluid, laughing character. The smaller more distant horses are in opposition of each other. One is noble and serious while the other is a silly, grinning character. These horses represent the people that appear in my life.

The atmosphere is deep and mysterious. The angel which is seen vaguely in the window symbolizes my mother guarding me as I quietly deal with life. The attitude of the imagery is silent and dreamy just as the title "On the Carrousel of Summer Dreams" indicates. The title can be interpreted literally--on the carrousel dreaming in summertime.

"Children Grew in Grandpa's Garden" is an image of my grandfather, the late Philip E. Paddock. Philip was a gentle old man who had spent his life as a farmer and family man. He is pictured in his favorite chair, dressed in his usual manner, reading a story to his great grandson, Michael Shaffer, who is mystified by the situation. An elf-like woman, perhaps myself or my mother, is very near to him, and is gazing at the print viewer as he spins a wispy, cobweb story to Michael. Philip's stories were very

enchanting and often dealt with horses as he liked them very much. The winged horse might symbolize one of his horses or the old man himself rising like the mythical phoenix from the tombstone-like archway. This particular scene never happened. Philip died before it could. The title, just as the image, means that children loved Philip.

"From the Outside Looking In" is a print of my father, Harold S. Shaffer, and myself. The image is the one I see daily. My father is engrossed in his newspaper while I cautiously gaze at him. The print illustrates the strange psychological tension existing in the relationship. The print emerges as a mystery of how minds can be distant when bodies are close, how love can be associated with fear, and how approval can exist simultaneously with disapproval. It is a sad story. The title, "From the Outside Looking In" depicts my frustration in being unsuccessful at breaking down the barriers in this relationship.

"Michael Smiling to the Wind" is a true example of mystery. The etching is an impression of Michael Oliveri, a man currently employed at Seabreeze Park. I chose Michael as a subject for a thesis print because I especially like him; aside from being quite striking physically, Michael is a most interesting and complex character. He is very bright and warm yet terribly secretive and mysterious. Not unlike the roller coaster he repairs, Michael seems falsely reckless and rough. My etching is concerned with the dark atmospheric tie Michael has to the roller coaster.

The image is of Michael taking on a hauntingly mocking smile as the roller coaster, the Jack Rabbit, claims to be fast, fast, fast. Both are quietly surrounded by an illusion of a darker past; neither are deserving of a bad reputation in that they are both innocently tame.

"The Charles P. Shaffer and Goggin Family" is a print of my brother Charles, his wife Damaris, and his son John. This print is for Charles, as it is of his fantasy. Charles is seen as the epitome of new fathers--very soft and proud of his new son. His wife looks on as Charles holds their son. Next to her is a shadow of a man-like creature named Goggin who was my brother's childhood imaginary playmate. The room is full of silverly shadows. Damaris and Goggin melt into each other; she is his companion in manhood just as Goggin was in his youth. They are one and the same.

"Full Time Illusions" is an etching of Sfona Pelah, a fellow artist and friend, and of myself. We are pictured on a chessboard sitting behind knights in a feeble attempt to protect ourselves. The atmosphere seems eerie and strange with mountains looming in the background and a sprinkling of odd mannequin-like pawns on the board. The column in the foreground represents order and civilization. The chess game symbolizes pseudo-intellectuality and mind games. Whereas the pawns represent the masses of powerless people, the knights represent friends or people with influence. This plate story deals with my frustration

at being forced to play mind games with no desire for actual participation. The plate symbolizes the inescapable reality that any "move" or pattern of behavior is a reaction to that which exists. The title, "Full Time Illusions" refers to the constant deceptions and misinterpretations which occur within one's life.

"A Case of Partial Extremes" is an etched story of my mother, Ethel P. Shaffer. My mother appears in the manner in which I choose to remember her--young, proud, and beautiful. A woman, myself, a bit older and tattered, stands holding a winged horse near for comfort as an angry horse-beast screams from behind. On a hill, which is falling away, sits a tombstone; it is my mother's grave. She is rising and escaping as the hill disintegrates. On the hill is the face of a man, perhaps my father, and an eye, symbolizing that this scene is a vision, a mental image which cannot become reality. This plate deals with the anger I continue to feel about the death of my mother. The title, "A Case of Partial Extremes" represents my frustrations--"partial" because I feel vulnerable and incomplete without my mother and "extremes" because death is very intense and final.

"The Deerslayers" is a print of my brother, Harold Allen Shaffer, his son, Michael, and his wife, Susan. Allen and Michael are pictured sleeping under a tree as Susan and a deer peacefully look on. Susan is very gentle and elegant, not unlike a deer. Allen is a soft-hearted

yet macho, man who hunts deer. The irony exists in that Allen loves to watch deer and symbolically is married to one; yet, he kills them for sport.



## CHAPTER II

### Reality and Fantasy

My work is conceptual and perceptual--the underlying theme is of primary importance yet it cannot be conveyed without a perceptual sense of reality. I must be able to discern the nearly actual from the imagined in order to communicate effectively. My style is neither photo-realism nor is it total abstraction; I use an illustrative style.

Etchings enable me to work through my own problems and solve mysteries for others. Because I can only communicate feelings I know and understand, my work is of an extremely personal nature. I present my life in fantasy-like images through the constant use of symbolism; however, the resulting image is often more concrete than actual reality. Since I employ a great deal of subtlety in my choice of symbols, my work may appear to be delicately bizarre and the print viewer may not make the appropriate connection with my ideas. At other times, I seem to acquire a spontaneous intimacy with the viewer in that my concept seems more readily acceptable.

I enjoy the constant definition and redefinition of my life that takes place in my work. As I work on an etching, time passes. The time allows me to think and

change, a luxury few people experience.

The nature of my etchings is symbolic. When I want to interpret an experience, I must abstract it, simplify it, and order it into a scene. In the process of sorting through thoughts, disentangling and examining experiences, I further define and validate myself with new thoughts and experiences. I seem to capture, retrieve, and focus upon random thoughts. I must gloss over distinctions to grasp at essences. Before my image is on paper, it is not uncommon to be unsure of what I may discover about myself.

It is a difficult task to discern reality from fantasy. By definition in The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, reality is the quality or state of being actual or true.<sup>1</sup> Fantasy is the realm of vivid imagination, reverie, depiction, illusion, and the like.<sup>2</sup> A fantasy is a mental image, possibly weird or chaotic--an illusion of an imagined event or condition fulfilling a wish. Reality is a physical truth as opposed to the emotional existence of truth in fantasy.

It is a good deal easier for most people to state and abstract idea than to describe and thus recreate some object which they actually see. Vision is more than actual sight; it involves the combination of memory with

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<sup>1</sup>The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 1971 ed., s.v. "reality."

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., s.v. "fantasy."

a stimulus. Part of that which is perceived comes through the senses; the other part comes through the mind. Ernest Hemingway wrote of the difficulties involved with perception in his novel, Death in the Afternoon. Hemingway stated, "I was trying to write...and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing what you truly felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, was to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion you experienced."<sup>3</sup>

Because each individual has a complicated matrix of similar but unique experiences, each person is different and has unique perceptions and deductions. The perceiver, when faced with a strange situation, analyzes and categorizes it to fit his own life pattern using his memory and his imagination. In Herman Hesse's novel Siddhartha, this idea is embraced. Hesse wrote that the things Siddhartha saw before his eyes were "regarded with distrust, condemned to be disregarded and ostracized from the thoughts, because it was not reality, because reality lay on the other side of the visible."<sup>4</sup> Everyone tries to have foresight, hindsight, and insight.

There are numerous types of fantasy, most types being autonomous imagery or imagery that cannot be controlled consciously. Autonomous imagery takes on several forms

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<sup>3</sup>James E. Miller, Jr., Word, Self, Reality The Rhetoric of Imagination (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., 1972), p. 118.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

including dreams, daydreams, hallucinations, hypnogogic imagery and hypnopompic imagery.<sup>5</sup> Dreams occur in sleep periods characterized with rapid eye movements and are rarely remembered and often bound in metaphorical language. Daydreams are experienced by a relaxed willingness to retreat from sensory input and to entertain inner thoughts and feelings. Daydreams are predictable in that they generally reverse a present frustration. Hallucinations are totally involuntary fantasies although they are caused by a reaction to the outer environment; they are inner images experienced as sense perceptions. Hypnogogic imagery is imagery which is experienced just before falling asleep whereas hypnopompic imagery occurs in the drowsy state of awakening. The imaginer sees a kind of technicolor surrealism; memory combines with fantasy and idealization.<sup>6</sup>

Although everyone experiences fantasy, there are social taboos against it. Daydreamers are considered lazy and escapist. Flights of imagination are associated with insanity. The only danger with inner imagery lies where the image directs the imaginer to such an extent that all sense of reality vanishes.

Mystery is anything that arouses curiosity because it is unexplained or inexplicable or secret.<sup>7</sup> A mystery

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<sup>5</sup>Robert H. McKim, Experiences In Visual Thinking (Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1972), p. 94.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>7</sup>The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 1971 ed., s.v. "mystery."

may have a symbolic significance. Mystery is an odd combination of reality, that which actually exists, and fantasy, an illusion of what might be. In mystery, perception as a true, actual sense, like vision, fails, and fantasy or imagination takes over if the mystery is to be solved. Mystery deals with a previously unresolved situation.

## CHAPTER III

### Technique

I must know how to control the projection of reality and imagination by having a good technical grasp on the situation. I cannot rely on accidents when trying to seriously express myself. An artist can be both an aesthetic intellectual and a technical craftsman.

The etchings for this thesis are all done on zinc plates of various dimensions. I generally shellac the backs of the plates to insure that the acid will not bite through the plate to my image. My plates are immersed in the acid many times before the image is complete.

I use several traditional intaglio methods. I begin my plates with etched lines in a 1 to 20 nitric acid solution as the plate surface is very smooth and this mild acid solution bites slowly enough to give a clean crisp line. Later lines may be added and are coarser because the plate surface is rougher; these lines are made by a stronger 1 to 10 nitric acid solution. After lines have been etched, I often used the deep bite method to establish physical levels on the plate; the process is done in a 1 to 6 nitric acid solution. I may apply a soft ground texture to the desired areas in a 1 to 10 nitric

acid solution. To differentiate between and establish areas of tone, I use a great deal of aquatint. I use both the rosin and spray types of aquatint; the rosin makes the tones coarser than the spray lacquer type. My aquatints vary from pale whitish ten second tones in a 1 to 10 nitric acid solution to rich fifteen minute blacks in the same solution. For smaller and more delicate areas, I use a sugarlift aquatint. I reinforce areas with a drypoint tool, a roulette, and an engraving tool.

These etchings are proofed and editioned on dampened Arches White Cover paper. They are printed in Graphic Chemical #514 black ink. I do not use tarlatan; I towel wipe the plates as my aquatints are not delicate and are designed to hold all of the ink that their surface can hold.

In 1925, Herman Hesse wrote Demian. In his novel, Hesse wrote that he believed that he "did not exist to write poems, to preach, or to paint, neither he nor anyone else. All of that was incidental. Each man had only one vocation--to find the way to himself."<sup>8</sup> The fundamental human capacity is the capacity and the need for creative self-expression so that there exists free control of the aspects of one's life and thought. It is crucial for me to use the language of etching as a free instrument of thought and expression; technique liberates me as the control of technique facilitates self-expression and self-realization. I am what I create.

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<sup>8</sup>Miller, Word, Self, Reality, p. 150.





Figure 1





Figure 2





Figure 3





Figure 4





Figure 5





Figure 6





Figure 7





Figure 8

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# ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

## OFFICE MEMORANDUM

To Fred Mayer, Chairman

Date 16 May 78

Subject Thesis - Ross Shaffer  
Fred,

I find Ross Shaffer's Thesis Report  
and prints acceptable. The thoughts are  
personal and stated in an interesting way.  
(Corrections Made 23 May - L.M.W.)

## OFFICE MEMORANDUM

To Prof. Fred Meyer Date March 30, 1978  
Chairman, Graduate Studies CFAA  
Subject Thesis: Lois R. Shaffer

I recommend that the Thesis entitled A Printmakers Interpretations in Mystery and Fantasy submitted by Lois R. Shaffer in March of 1978 as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts be accepted. - and, if possible, with encomium.

Even though I have been counsel in the preparation and execution of this Thesis, my reading of it in its final form was a new and interesting experience. It is the student's own work, thought and "self" - all the way.

Prof. Printmaking  
and Illustration.

Judd Williams

5/10/78

Regarding Lois Shaffer's thesis - A  
Printmaker's Interpretations in Mystery and  
Fantasy . It has my acceptance.

I would only comment about here writing  
from a defensive position - defending the  
validity of fantasy, it seems. Whereas,  
I believe this has been a viable creative  
area for centuries. Then I suppose the title  
could have been more appropriately: My  
Mystery & Fantasy Etchings (as no other media was  
included: charcoal, wash on newsprint, etc. etc.)

Sincerely



Office Memo

One Lomb Memorial Drive  
Rochester, New York 14623

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Robert H. Johnston, Dean, College of Fine and Applied Arts  
Fred Meyer  
May 24, 1978  
Thesis - Lois R. Shaffer

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I recommend the acceptance of the thesis "A Printmaker's Interpretations In Mystery and Fantasy" as meeting the requirements of the Master of Fine Arts degree.

Yours truly,

copy: Judd Williams

RECEIVED

MAY 25 1978

Dr. R. H. Johnston  
College of Fine & Applied Arts

*approved*

*5/26/78*